

San Ellsberg

MEMORANDUM

To: H. S. Rowen

11-5-69

From: R. A. Levine

M-7767

Subject: THE GREAT LETTERS FLAP: ENTRY #3156X

Copies to: K. Archibald, G. Shubert

I didn't think I would try to get into the Great Letters Flap, but Kathy Archibald's memo inspired me to set down at least one point I feel is quite important in regard to what happens next. I agree thoroughly with Kathy's analysis and with the kind of Rand she wants to come out with; I am not quite that sure about her major recommendation.

I should like to make two points, the one of which I feel quite strongly about, the other somewhat less strongly. The first (with which Kathy may not disagree) is that if at all possible we should avoid coming out with a written policy on Rand researchers going public with their conclusions, avoid even written guidelines concerning the rules for going public. Either a set policy or general guidelines defined on a piece of paper would be, I think, very harmful; ambiguity has its uses.

I don't think that we are likely to come to a meaningful consensus at Rand on the issue of when a researcher should or should not make public his conclusions and opinions. There may be bounds on the range of Rand opinion on that issue, but they are likely to be so wide that all they exclude is on the one hand an immediate letter to the editor on any subject that a staff member fancies, and on the other hand a refusal to go outside of channels under any circumstances whatever. Maybe they don't even exclude these, I don't know. But the point is that if we come out with a clearcut policy that seems to set rules determining almost every case, a lot of people will disagree. And because of the disagreement with a written Rand policy, the policy will in itself get people upset who otherwise wouldn't much care. The danger is raising an issue of principle which becomes important to those for whom no issue of practice would have existed had the principle not been raised.

On the other hand, we might avoid issues of principle by coming out with a very broad set of general guidelines, but this would then be a meaningless document helping little and it would be recognized as such. It is difficult or impossible to spell out all cases in advance and attempts to do so in the past have ordinarily ended up quite meaningless, particularly when the guidelines have represented a set of compromises. As I understand the attempts to create broad military doctrine in the past, such doctrine has ended up being so broad as to be non-operational. And my own experience with trying to create mission statements for OEO programs has been the same. Attempts to put these things down on paper just very seldom come out relevant to the real questions at hand.

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Lacking such a written policy beyond that in the memo you have already issued, people at Rand will decide when to go public on the basis of their own personal calculus, as aided by the Levien Committee or some successor and by Rand management. This personal calculus can be described as one that will result in people going public when they feel strongly enough about an issue to override their feeling for the ordinary constraints. I think this is as it should be. Rand will work best as an intellectual and policy-affecting community if it combines a feeling of freedom on the part of the researchers to go public if they really want to, with an avoidance of the picture of an organization that decides all issues in public. I don't know how to spell this out in any more detail than that single sentence and I doubt that it can be spelled out meaningfully. And if nothing is set on paper, this favorable way is precisely the way it is likely to come out. If we are forced to go to paper, however, the paper will inevitably make attitudes more rigid.

On the second point, I feel substantially less strongly. I have some doubts about Kathy's suggestion for structured meetings. The doubts are based on two things. First, it may be that the whole Flap is dying down now and I would hate to revive it. Second, I am afraid that if structured meetings are held without coming out with a written statement of the type discussed above, the fact of no statement would then make people feel that they had been patted on the back and given the idiot treatment--that they had been consulted with no intention of letting them make any difference. Therefore, there will be some pressure for the meetings to lead to a stated policy, willy nilly.

But Kathy feels strongly that such meetings are needed and I am not sure that they are not. I would suggest two considerations on whether they are held or not. First, if it seems likely that the controversy is going to boil along with no result anyhow, then we might as well hold the meetings; if it looks like the issue is going to die down without people being particularly unhappy, then we should avoid meetings. I don't know what is happening or is likely on continuing in-fighting, but there ought to be some way of making soundings.

Second, if the lack of communication within Rand--particularly that among members of different departments, particularly particularly that between engineers and social scientists--cannot be corrected in any other way, then meetings seem to be in order. Although the communications difficulties between the softs and the hards have certainly been exacerbated by the Great Letters Flap, communication was pretty lousy to begin with and the Letters Flap might be a good way to start doing something that would probably be a good idea anyhow. There may be other alternatives--if, for example, you, Gus, Goldy and Bruno were to make a point of walking among the natives with you and Gus walking into the offices of the engineers and Goldy and Bruno

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among the social scientists, this might help. But I realize there are a hell of a lot of natives and not that much time in Management. Meetings may thus be the only answer, but if structured meetings are held, it should be made clear at the outset that these are meetings to hear and discuss, but not to produce a written policy.

R. A. Levine

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